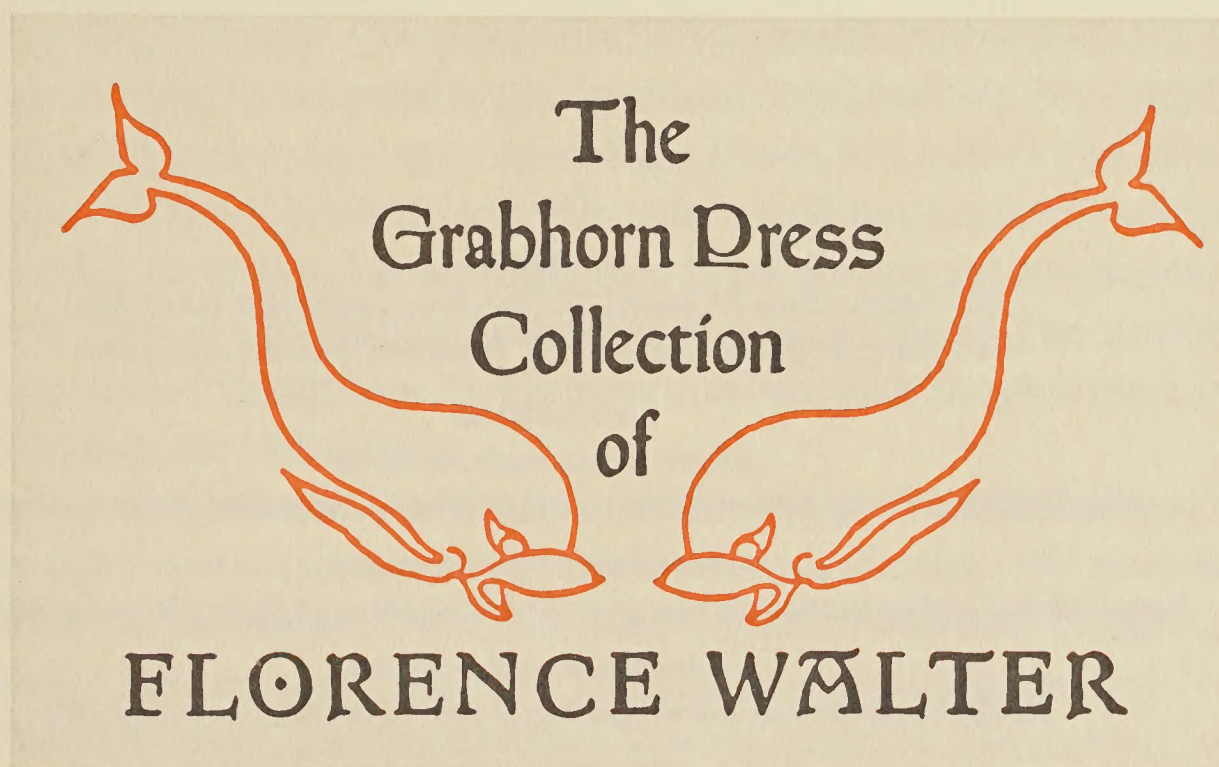


QUARTERLY

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THE BOOK CLUB OF CALIFORNIA



FLORENCE SCHWARTZ WALTER'S BOOKPLATE

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The Legacy of Florence Schwartz Walter

HENRY L. SNYDER

Remembering Florence Walter

Florence G. Walter (1884-1972) holds a special place in the annals of The Book Club of California. She joined in 1913, served on several committees, including the Board of Directors, and from 1952 to 1955 became the Club's first woman president. Florence was prominent in social and cultural circles in San Francisco for decades. She had a notable collection of Asian art and in the 1930s became a professional bookbinder. She studied locally and in France to become one of the finest binders in the French style working in the United States. We celebrated her craftsmanship in the Club's exhibition over the summer and through several programs. To gain a sense of her personality, I drew on oral histories at The Bancroft Library given by her daughters Nell in 1992 and Marjorie in 1998-1999, plus memories of her grandchildren.

Born on April 4, 1884, at the family residence at 515 Van Ness, Florence Walter was that rarity, a native San Franciscan, and the elder of two sisters. Pearl arrived in November 1886. Her father, Isidor Schwartz (1852-1903), with brothers William and Samuel, arrived in California in 1874 from Kempen, West Prussia, then part of the German Empire. The three settled in San Luis Obispo. While running a general store there, gregarious Isidor became enough of a politician and community leader to become postmaster of San Marcos, six miles north of Paso Robles, in 1878.

There, too, Isidor met Adolph Stahl, who had also arrived from Kempen, West Prussia in 1880, age nineteen, seven years younger than he. In the early 1880s, their thoughts turned to San Francisco. For Isidor, her name was Henrietta (Nettie) Cohn born in Ohio in June 1867 to German-born parents; for Adolph, it was sister Rosalie, three years younger, and born further west in Iowa. Isidor wed in 1883; Stahl in 1886 and he and Rosalie moved to Guatemala.

Isidor first appears in the San Francisco city directory for 1883 as a commission merchant. Two years later his business expanded to become Schwartz Brothers, including his two brothers still in San Luis Obispo. Yet, "commission merchant" tells us nothing, but the Cohn sisters tell us everything. Their husbands imported coffee from Guatemala and El Salvador.

In August 1894, "Mr. and Mrs. William Wilson gave an elaborate dinner party last week in honor of Mme. De Reyna Barrios, wife of the President of Guatemala. The floral decorations were superb, and the music was furnished by the Hungarian orchestra," the *Call* reported. The Schwartzes were among the thirty that gathered.

Well, they ought to have been there to honor the wife of Jean Maria Reyna Barrios, the nephew of the more famous Justo Rufino Barrios. First, German-born William Wilson, who arrived in San Francisco in 1868 at age twenty-five, married Hannah Cohn, the middle sister, in 1880. Second, the Sacramento *Union* on October 9, 1897, reported that the Schwartz Brothers were "the mercantile agents of the Guatemalan Government." The firm had one active member, Isidor.

Schwartz so prospered that in 1897 he bought a home at 2231 Clay that befitted his commercial importance. It had been built by a relative of Mark Hopkins and occupied half a city block. Daughter Nell remembered it as "a marvelous, ancient Victorian on the corner of Clay and Buchanan streets in San Francisco, with an enormous lawn [and] a huge house, dark red, and a dark red-painted garage, where my grandmother's chauffeur slept."

When the girls were teenagers in the 1890s, their father took them for extended stays on some of his many trips to Latin America. A souvenir from one of these trips—a picture of Florence and Pearl in native Guatemalan costumes—was seen in our exhibition. It is one of the few family memories of this generation.

There were tensions around becoming American. The Schwartzes were Polish Jews, while the German-Jewish society of San Francisco looked down upon such Eastern Europeans as their social inferiors. While the family had wealth, they did not have status. Typically, the first American-born generation discards the European past. "I couldn't get anything out of [my mother] about her background," daughter Marjorie recalled. "She was not like me, anxious to talk about herself or her life."

Her sister Nell had a stronger reaction. "Being an artist and becoming a bookbinder—and she didn't until she was fifty—was....," Nell opined, "because she hated being Jewish. One way of being accepted was to get into the cultural scene in San Francisco."

On September 14, 1903, Isidor Schwartz, age fifty-two, died, leaving his thirty-six year-old widow disconsolate and one million dollars. In 1906, Nettie and the two girls had just returned from Europe and were

living in the St. Francis Hotel while their house was being renovated. Then the earthquake struck on April 18, and the still grieving Nettie died suddenly and mysteriously, evidently of a broken heart, on August 4. She left Florence, twenty, and Pearl, eighteen, alone, and Adolph Stahl to administer the estate.

The darts of Cupid sometimes strike randomly. Word came to Edgar Walter (1877-1938) and his younger brother John Walter (1879-1930), Nell joyfully recalled, "that there were these two absolutely beautiful, exotic young women in the St. Francis Hotel who needed help. It was very romantic. And so they went to call, and [two weeks apart in February 1907] they each married one of the sisters," John to Florence and Edgar to Pearl. Edgar was a sculptor and the newly married couple moved to Paris where he wanted to live, while Florence and John moved into the big house on Clay Street.

The Walters originated in the village Reckendorf, in Bavaria, as did the Hellmans and the Haases, neighbors both in their birthplace and their adopted home in California. As Florence married into a German-Jewish family, she gained her sought and deserved status.

Nine sons were born to Nathan and Rosalie Walter and at least six of them migrated to the United States. The first to arrive in San Francisco were David Nathan Walter and Emanuel Walter, who in 1858 started a wholesale and retail floor coverings and draperies business. Emmanuel eventually returned to Europe and built an important art collection, which he bequeathed to his favorite nephew, sculptor Edgar Walter, who gave it to the San Francisco Art Institute as the Emmanuel Walter Collection.

Of more importance to us, in 1858, their younger brother Isaac Nathan Walter, fifteen, also came to California, where he became a company salesman. In 1877, Nathan married twenty year-old Caroline Greenebaum, daughter of Jacob Greenebaum, a partner in the clothing import firm of Henry Cohn & Co. This surname suggests the Schwartz side of the family. The young Walters quickly had two sons, Edgar and John, plus daughter Marian, born fifteen years later. When David Nathan died, Isaac ran the business and, on his death, son John took over D.N. & E. Walter & Co.

John and Florence led an active social life. In addition to his role as a business leader, John was an important patron of the arts. He was a key figure in saving the Palace of Fine Arts in 1919 after the close of the

Panama-Pacific Exposition and served as president of the San Francisco Art Institute. Florence enthusiastically entertained artists, conductors, and others involved in the cultural life of the city.

John Walter loved sailing and fishing, and on a fishing expedition on the Truckee River with Edgar he decided to build a home there. The two brothers explored the upper reaches of the river until John finally settled on a site two and one-half miles south of Lake Tahoe. Through the years it grew as the family grew, developing into a large estate with a main house, guest and servants' quarters, and outbuildings. The family spent summers there and entertained regularly. After John's death in 1930, Florence kept open house for nearly three decades, finally selling the estate in 1958. Nell remembered, "Mother worked like a dog over the social part of it. She kept the place full of people her age, people of my age, [and of Nell's daughter] Margot's age. Sometimes there were seventeen people for dinner, and lunch and breakfast, for three weeks at a time."

The train would stop at the property, named Rampart, to leave or pick up guests and supplies. With both family and guests present there was always a large gathering and a broad range of activities, notably parlor games and, as their daughter Nell was later to remark, there was always a lot of gossip and bashing of those absent.

John and Florence had four children, John (1908-1918), Eleanor, that is Nell (1910-1997), Marjorie (1913-2003), and Carol (1917-2002). They were raised by an English governess, Elsie Jeeves, known as Jeevie. The Club has an Anglican devotional work in the Walter Collection that Florence bound for Jeevie.

Yet the death of loved ones followed and haunted Florence Walter's life, just as such tragedies did her mother. When she was five and six, a sister and brother died in infancy. At nineteen, in 1903, her father departed, and her mother followed in 1906. Sister Pearl died of pernicious anemia in 1913 and then the Spanish influenza carried off her son John in 1918. Granddaughter Margot commented that the "family handled that [the successive deaths] so, so badly" that Florence "went into this deep grief for like forever and ever and ever and ever."

The worst was yet to come. Husband John, unwell for years, carried on a busy schedule in spite of his illness. The family made two trips to Europe in the twenties with John managing a passel of women—his mother, his wife, his three daughters, and their governess—packed with their extensive luggage into two large touring cars. John suffered from

Bright's disease for many years with accompanying headaches. He finally succumbed to nephritis on March 5, 1930, leaving Florence to manage the estate, two houses, three children, and the business. Florence was impacted profoundly.

John's death left his widow severely depressed and it took her years to recover. "My mother wasn't able to take part in any family gatherings for about ten years [because of] her tragedy," Nell said, while Marjorie told a similar story. "She was pretty gloomy about it, but she was pretty worn down by then. She was in mourning for a long time, which was hard."

Luckily, John had identified the next manager of D.N. & E. Walter & Co. He was Nell's fiancé, and he came from the family tree. John's twenty-six year-old sister, Marian, had married Edgar Sinton, a third cousin, in 1920. At the wedding Stanley Sinton, Jr., twelve, of Boston, was the ring bearer, while ten-year-old Nell was the flower girl. She reminisced, "We got into this crazy correspondence, which began right away [when Stanley wrote] 'I love you dearly. Will you marry me?'" By the time they were teenagers they were committed, and they were engaged at the time of John's death. Stanley was twenty-one and Nell twenty.

For Florence it was a marriage of convenience and the couple knew it. "I think [my parents] didn't approve," Nell sadly recalled, "but after my father died [my mother] was extremely interested" in having the business manager in the family. Nell and Stanley were married on June 15, 1930, three months after John's death. Stanley became president of the company and ran it very successfully until his death.

Florence's lukewarm welcome of Stanley Sinton into the family was symptomatic. She did not take the opportunity to become closer to her children but immersed herself in other activities. She went to work as an assistant to Dr. Tom Addis, her husband's physician, at Stanford Hospital. She did his statistical work, calculating with a slide rule, and wrote an article for him published in 1939, "Organ Work and Organ Weight" in the *Journal of Experimental Medicine*.

But Florence primarily filled in the gap these losses left by collecting Grabhorn Press productions and becoming a bookbinder. As people age, their brains become creative. "She kind of brightened up," Marjorie recalled. When Florence sold the family home in 1952 and moved into a new one with a studio built for her by William Wurster at 1231 Larkin Street, it became "a big change and she got very modern." This "striking studio," one binder found, was "well-equipped," with plenty of light, workspace, and

cabinets. She concluded, Florence “built [the] house, I think, around the studio.” Additionally, her involvement in and presidency of the Book Club in the 1950s lifted her spirits. “She really blossomed at that time because she loved what she was doing and she did it so well,” Marjorie commented.

Bibliophile Florence Walter Collects the Grabhorn Press

Florence Walter’s interest in books went back a long way, probably to her childhood. She joined the Book Club in 1913, avidly collected, and made erudite and witty bookseller David Magee (1905-1977) her “very, very good friend.” While no record of her library exists, her greatest bibliophilic legacy, the Florence Walter Grabhorn Collection, does. It is the most complete Grabhorn collection in private hands, exceeding even that of Elinor Heller, a friend and bibliographer of the Grabhorn Press, which is now in The Bancroft Library. Florence’s granddaughter, Margot Sinton Biestman inherited her grandmother’s collection, and now, thanks to the great generosity of Margot and her husband, Perry Biestman, it has come to The Book Club of California.

Why did it come to the Club? Several factors coalesced. Donor Margot Sinton Biestman wrote to President Anne W. Smith on May 5 that the decision came from “the close and long association that my grandmother had with the Book Club; the splendid facilities you have in which to house [the collection]; and that the fact that support for, display of, and education about the fine press in California is central to your mission.”

Club enthusiasm on April 29 played its part. “The splendid reception, program, and exhibition the Club sponsored,” Margot wrote, “confirmed the wisdom of our choice. Our thanks to you and your colleagues for honoring Florence Walter in this fashion and permitting us and our family to share in it.” The article in the last *Quarterly News-Letter* captures only a portion of the excitement of that evening.

How historically important is this gift? Gary Kurutz, eminent librarian, bibliographer, historian, and past president of the Book Club, eloquently describes how Walter/Biestman generosity fits into the Albert Sperisen Library of The Book Club of California. “The Grabhorn Press is the most important fine press in California and Western History,” Kurutz wrote our Club President on May 8, “and ranks as one of the most admired presses in the world. Moreover, the Grabhorn Press and the Book Club are inextricably linked together. As you well know, the Club commissioned

the Grabhorn Press to do many of its early publications and the Grabhorn brothers appreciated the patronage of the Club. In turn, the excellence of their work for the Club clearly established this relatively new institution as a leading force in the book world."

Its significance is overwhelming, Kurutz continued: "This would represent the single most important library gift in the Club's one hundred year history. The completeness of the collection is simply astonishing." Furthermore, these Grabhorn holdings testify to the Club's devotion to book arts and enhance the goals of the Library Committee. Kurutz concluded, the Walter Collection makes "the library even more of a magnet for the study of the fine press movement in California and the West."

What does the Club now have? First, the basics. Edwin and Robert Grabhorn moved from Indiana to San Francisco in 1919, and the first two bibliographic volumes of their work, which were published during Florence's life, tally 583 items; the final volume, completed in 1977, adds another seventy-one. All list some ephemera. The volumes are: *Bibliography of the Grabhorn Press 1915-1940* by Elinor Raas Heller & David Magee (San Francisco: Grabhorn Press, 1940); *Bibliography of the Grabhorn Press 1950-1956* by Dorothy and David Magee (San Francisco: Grabhorn Press, 1957); and *Bibliography of the Grabhorn Press 1957-1966 & Grabhorn / Hoyem 1966-1973* edited by Robert Harlan (San Francisco: John Howell Books, 1977).

Captivated by quality, Florence began collecting early. She bound her copies of the first two bibliographic volumes and meticulously checked off each item in her possession. There appear to be very few if any items missing. Some of the items bear booksellers' annotations. Some she must have acquired directly from the press, perhaps through a standing order. A number she commissioned.

The Club recently picked up the bulk of the collection, but still must go through it. We have a large folio volume with many broadsides tucked in, each bearing a reference to the corresponding entry in the bibliographies. Another large folio contains additional broadsides including examples from their Studio Press in Indiana.

Florence bound or collected finely-bound copies of Grabhorn publications. Interestingly enough, the earliest hand-bound Grabhorn title in the collection is not by Florence but by Otis Oldfield and bears the inscription by Edwin Grabhorn on the colophon, "This copy was bound by Otis Oldfield when he came back from Paris in 1925." It is

The Story of Enriquez Chu Chu by Bret Harte, number seventy in the Grabhorn bibliography. The press privately printed 100 copies for Herbert Lionel Rothschild.

Florence bound twenty-one Grabhorns, now in our possession either by gift or loan. The most remarkable item in the collection is number 346, Lord Macaulay's "*On the Durability of American Institutions*": *A Letter Written in 1857* (San Francisco, 1941). The colophon states, "50 copies privately printed for Florence S. Walter in February 1941. Also one copy printed on vellum." Our copy is the copy printed on vellum. It is bound in full brown morocco, with gold-tooled lines and multi-colored morocco inlays on the covers and doublures, and with black silk endpapers.

Another very rare Grabhorn Press book in the collection is *To Soong Mei-Ling, Madame Chiang Kai-Shek, honored guest of America* "from the women of California". The colophon states, "This message was written by Aurelia Henry Reinhardt and one copy [was] printed at the Grabhorn Press, San Francisco California March 27, 1943." Either Madame Chiang Kai-Shek gave it to Florence or another copy was printed for her! It is not even listed in the bibliography. It was bound by Walter in full crushed morocco and consists of black on the front cover, spine, and one quarter of the rear cover; green morocco inlays of Chinese characters on the front; crushed green morocco on three-quarters of the rear cover; gold endpapers with green and black crushed morocco leather borders; and gold tooling on the doublures.

There are two copies of number 135, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, with illustrations by Edward A. Wilson (New York: Limited Editions Club, 1930). One was bound by Florence Walter in full tan morocco with an island, three trees, and a hut or tent made of multi-colored leather onlays on the cover and gold lettering on the spine. The other has two original watercolor illustrations as well as a cartoon by Florence laid in. It is bound in black and blue full morocco with a gold-tooled circle design on the covers; gold-tooled letters on the spine; turn-ins of black morocco; and decorated endpapers.

One item is especially poignant. It is John Barry's memorial to Walter's husband, published in the San Francisco *Call-Bulletin* as *A tribute to John I. Walter* (San Francisco: Grabhorn Press, 1931). Five copies, including one on vellum, were privately printed for Florence Walter and bound in brown niger. The Club has the vellum copy and one of the four paper copies.

The latest Grabhorn publication bound by Florence is again one she commissioned. Her grandson, Peter Sinton, wrote of his memories of their Tahoe home, Rampart. Florence liked it so much she had it printed in an edition of thirty copies, one of which she bound in brown levant morocco and designed both covers with multi-colored onlay. The book is Peter Sinton's *Childhood Memories of Summers at Lake Tahoe* (San Francisco: Privately Printed, 1962. Thirty copies printed at the Grabhorn Press).

Two special titles in the production of the Grabhorn Press are works by Ansel Adams. The first is number 95, *Paramelian Prints of the High Sierras*. Printed for Jean Chambers Moore, the publisher, in 1927, and bearing his imprint, it is a portfolio of eighteen photographic prints and this was Adam's first portfolio. The other is number 137, *Taos Pueblo Photographed by Ansel Easton Adams and Described by Mary Austin*, published in 1930. Both are in very fine condition.

One other item deserves special mention. It is a five-page pamphlet, bound in green morocco with gold tooling, *Edwin Grabhorn, printer and friend* (San Mateo, CA: Quercus Press, 1938). Apparently written by David Magee, it states, "A group of your friends and admirers...give expression to their admiration of your work...In affection and gratitude, we sign ourselves." There is a long list of signers, among them Florence Walter. But what makes this so special is in the inscription by Edwin to Florence: "For Florence after sixteen years because I want her to have it. Ed Grabhorn Apr. 4, 1954". It is a precious memento.

Of the Grabhorn ephemera one item must be noticed here. It is a single sheet recording a visit of the Grabhorns and the Branstens (Joseph and Ellen?) to Rampart with no indication of date. The only Grabhorn mentioned by name is Jane so it must have included Robert and Jane and perhaps Edwin and his then wife (he was married three times). It describes their trip up and their stay with pictures, all hand-colored, sometimes substituted for words. It is a delightful, fanciful piece.

Once we have received, analyzed, and cataloged the whole collection we will no doubt have many more interesting discoveries to report.

The Book Bindings of Florence Walter

In spite of her wealth, her social and familial responsibilities, Florence undertook a demanding and arcane profession in mid-life and dedicated

herself to it unswervingly until the end of her life. She began in 1934 or close there-to. Because of the many demands upon her time, her output is relatively small compared to that of those teams of professional specialists who bound books for a livelihood. Yet, her bindings match the print quality of her Grabhorns in beauty and breadth. Florence performed every bookbinding task from first to last and prided herself upon her mastery of the entire process.

This fit in with her outlook on life. She determined to control all aspects of her life—as matriarch and head of family; as the manager of a large household in two settings, San Francisco and Lake Tahoe; and whatever tasks she set herself. Florence only worked with the finest materials: leathers, tools, and more imported from France, the epicenter of the trade.

She studied first with Herbert and Peter Fahey. Then she worked with Belle McMurtry Young, another celebrated woman bookbinder in San Francisco, whose husband, William R. Young, had been the second president of the Book Club. We have two bindings by Belle Young among the bindings given to us by the Bissinger siblings, Florence's grandchildren. They are two copies of ten of a work printed by their parents, Emile Souvestre's *Saint Galonner* (San Francisco: Marjorie & Paul Bissinger, 1941). Bissinger ran a small proof press and Maggie set type.

Duncan Olmsted, in a series of oral histories on Bay Area bookbinding conducted by Club contributors Ruth Teiser and Catherine Harroun in 1981-1982, remarked that Young bound "in the old tradition." That is, "her designs could be put on any book."

Florence, though, had a more creative mind. Olmsted found her bindings in the early French style "magnificent things." Significantly, they were "more illustrative of the text." French binding became a tour-de-force, an art object itself, as the French insisted that the book itself had importance.

For inspiration and pleasure, Florence collected bindings done by the finest French craftsmen. Her grandson, John Walter Sinton, gave us two extraordinary ones. One is designed by Rose Adler (1890-1959). This Parisian was a founding member of the Société de la Reliure Originale and a key figure in the later phase of Art Deco bookbinding. The book is Guillaume Apollinaire's *Le poète assassiné* with lithographs by Raoul Dufy (Argenteuil: R. Coulouma, 1926), sumptuously bound in full black morocco with title in gold tooling on the cover and ornamented with red and tan leather overlays. It stands as a superb Art Deco design. The other

binding, from the atelier of Marius Michaud, is even more striking. The book is Oscar Wilde's *Two Tales* (Paris: F.-L. Schmied, 1926), and is one of twenty copies, bound in red morocco with many colored plates and an elaborate geometric gold tooled design of hexagonal lines and tooled dots, and tan leather onlays on both covers and spine.

By the 1940s, connoisseurs recognized Walter as a leading American bookbinder working in the French style, and in the next decade she resolved to become even better. Walter contacted her contemporary, Paul Bonet (1889-1971), who designed bindings with intense graphics. His fame arose from 550 splendid creations his atelier produced between 1941 and 1967 for Paris publisher Gaston Gallimard. Bonet referred Florence to Charles Collet, one of his best finishers. She studied with him for two months in 1953 and her skill so increased that the *Bohemian Club Library Notes* declared later that Walter was "the greatest binder of the French school in the United States."

I have tried to figure out how many books Florence bound between 1934 and her death in 1972. In an article she wrote in 1954, "A Bookbinder in Paris," published in *For Woman's Service* that February, she said she had produced seventy-five bindings to date. There were fifty-eight Walter bindings in the Club's exhibition, and we have records for an additional twenty-three from exhibition catalogs, library catalogs, and a 1973 family typescript list.

Quite naturally, Florence's productivity tapered off in her later years. One clue can be taken from the seventy-two imprints of her bound books. There are eight from before 1920; eleven from the 1920s; twenty-four from the 1930s; eighteen from the 1940s; and ten from the 1950s, and the Rampart book in the 1960s. Half of her 1950s production was commissioned. We have a record for sixty-one of the seventy-five she produced through 1953, or ninety percent of the survivors. As custodians of her bibliographic heritage, we will endeavor to establish a complete record of her legacy.

We showed all the bindings from her multi-generational family in the exhibition, forty-seven were gifts and twelve were loans. In fact, our inspiration for the exhibition came from the gift of Paul A. Bissinger, Jr. and his two siblings, Tom Bissinger and Peggy Bissinger Pressman, of thirteen bindings. Other family members generously loaned or gave the rest of the works. Of these, one she bound with grandchild John Sinton

is particularly special. It is *Travels into Norway, Denmark, and Russia in the Years 1788, 1789, 1790, and 1791* by A. Swinton, Esq. (Dublin: W. Corbet for W. Jones and J. Rice, 1792). John Sinton was the only grandchild whom his grandmother taught to bind and they did a book together. The others showed no interest in bookbinding. Daughter and artist Nell found the process too rigid, confining, controlling:

Have you ever seen anybody bind a book by hand? The stages they go through? Just getting the leather ready. You have a piece of leather, and it's pretty thick, and you scrape, and scrape, and scrape—and it's expensive, if it's good leather—and if you slip you make a hole, and you throw away the whole skin, practically.

I used to help Mother dye the end-papers sometimes, because I enjoyed doing that, and that's easy. I forget—is it you put oil on water, and it makes it marbled—I helped her with that. I helped her with the designs sometimes; when she was stuck she used to ask me to help her. But those tools [gasp], if that slips—the gold tooling—and it's hot, it has to be hot—Forget, it, it's awful. It's very compulsive, it's just so compulsive.

One professional bookbinder has advised me that the most notable feature of Florence's bindings is the originality and beauty of her designs. This is immediately evident when you inspect them, but with two exceptions it is not possible to date them. We have, however, compiled two useful guides. We have listed all her bindings in chronological order by date of the publication of the book. That gives us the earliest possible date for any given title. Then, Florence used two different book stamps. The earliest is BOUND BY F. S. WALTER and there are only five such books. Three were published in 1929; two published in 1934. The balance bear the stamp FLORENCE WALTER. Additionally, some simple bindings with no binder's stamp reside in the collection. All are full morocco with minimal tooled lines. These could be her first trial efforts.

It would take far too many pages to describe all of Florence's bindings here. Moreover, words are inadequate; they have to be seen. Most fall into five groupings. The first are all quite simple with minimal, if any, tooling, but all full morocco.

The second are the free-style designs, Art Deco in style, featuring onlays of multi-colored leathers. These drawings all reflect the title or contents of the work. The *Robinson Crusoe* bindings have a design with a palm tree.

The binding for Paul Gauguin's *Noa Noa: Voyage a Tahiti* (Stockholm: Victor Pettersons, 1947) is bound in full green morocco with yellow and green leather onlays in the shape of palm fronds and gilt tooling on covers and spine, title in gold tooling on front cover, and multi-colored inlays on the perimeter of the end covers. The binding for *Sand Paintings of the Navajo Shooting Chant* by Franc J. Newcomb with text by Gladys A. Richard (N. Y.: J. J. Augustin, 1931) is sand-colored levant morocco with designs from the text in multi-colored onlays. Similar bindings are found on Peter Sinton's remembrances of Rampart, *Childhood Memories of Summers at Lake Tahoe* (San Francisco: Privately Printed, 1962), which includes stylized trees and pine cones, and W. H. Hudson's *Green Mansions*. One of my own personal favorites is that for *Salambo* by Gustave Flaubert (Golden Cockerel Press, 1931). It is bound in full black morocco with the figure of Salambo on the cover, buildings on the doublures made of colored morocco onlays, and gold tooling on the spine and both covers.

The third group, also onlays, consists mainly of geometric designs. One of the most notable is that for *Into the Night Life* by Henry Miller and Bezalel Schatz (Berkeley: 1947). It bears an inscription from Miller: "To Florence Walter—The rare artist to whom an author is proud to surrender his text so that it may be cherished forever. [Signed] Henry Miller." It is bound in full black morocco with geometric designs in green, black, yellow, and flesh colored morocco onlays on the front and back covers, and gold tooling. The binding for the aforementioned Macaulay letter is also notably rich in color and layout.

The fourth group is mainly distinguished by gold tooling in geometric designs. They also give testimony to Walter's skill and steady hand. Two bindings stand out. One is for what is perhaps the most valuable book in the collection, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, with illustrations by Henri Matisse (New York: Limited Editions Club, 1935). It is bound in full green morocco with gold-tooled designs on both covers and spine, and housed in a clamshell box. The Club has Walter's cartoons for this binding as it does for a number of the others. The other binding that is particularly striking in the fourth group is Jacques Chambaudet's *Vision and Technique* (Editions Petrides, 1947), which is bound in brown levant morocco with an intricate wheel composed of gold tooling and mosaic dots on both covers.

Finally there are a few bindings that do not fit into any special category. A fine example is Walter's binding for *Mon docteur le vin: aquarelles de Raoul Dufy; texte de Gaston Derys* (Paris: Draeger Frères, 1936). It is bound

in full brown crushed morocco in two tones—dark on the front cover and spine, lighter on the rear cover—with names of wines in semi-circle gold lettering on both covers and title on spine. The doublures are tipped in brown morocco with names of wines in gold lettering and it has French decorative end papers.

In addition to bindings, Florence's granddaughter Patricia Sinton Adler has given us two beautiful photographs of Florence taken in 1928 by her Dutch-born contemporary Johan Hagemeyer (1884-1962). Alongside his work in photography, Hagemeyer hosted a salon for artists and intellectuals. His two portraits of Florence adorned the invitation we sent out for the exhibition and the keepsake prepared for it. As well as the photographs, the exhibition included a splendid watercolor of Florence painted by her daughter Nell, a noted artist in her own right, and loaned to us by Nell's daughter, Margot Sinton Biestman.

This brief sketch of Florence Walter cannot do full justice to an exquisite woman, remarkable for her beauty, her intelligence, her artistic abilities, and notable as an art connoisseur, a bibliophile, and a music devotee. She had a wide circle of admirers and friends, and while her relationship with her children was more tempered and sometimes difficult, her grandchildren and great-grandchildren lovingly knew her as "Gaggy." Above all, her pioneering work as woman in the Book Club, and now the gift of her bindings and her Grabhorn Collection to the library, will forever enshrine her in our library and in our history. We salute Florence Schwartz Walter.

HENRY L. SNYDER has been a BCC Board Director since 2010 and is chair of the Club's Library Committee. He is also professor emeritus of history at the University of California, Riverside, and the former director of the Center for Bibliographical Studies and Research. A senior scholar in the fields of British history, specializing in the early 18th century and bibliography, he is the author of numerous scholarly articles. At the end of 2009 Queen Elizabeth II was pleased to approve Dr. Snyder's appointment as an honorary officer (O.B.E.) of The Most Excellent Order of the British Empire for "services to English Studies worldwide."



NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING
The Book Club of California
Tuesday, October 15, 2013, 2 p.m.
312 Sutter St., Suite 500, San Francisco





Photograph of Florence Walter by Johan Hagemeyer (1928)





On the Durability of American Institutions
by Lord Macaulay, printed at The Grabhorn Press





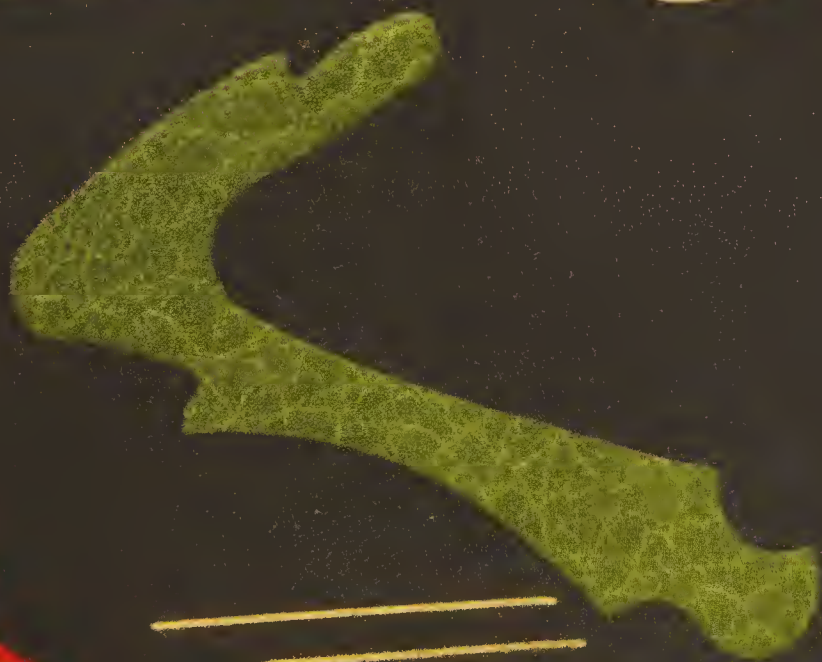
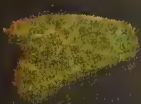
Erewhon (inside front board & endpaper)

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Green Mansions by W. H. Hudson (detail)

Preserving the Legacy of

FLORENCE WALTER

in the Albert Sperisen Library

at The Book Club of California

This four-color supplement has been prepared by the Library Committee of The Book Club of California (Henry L. Snyder, Chair) for insertion in the Fall 2013 issue of the *Quarterly News-Letter*: photography by Douglas Sandberg, design & typography by Kathleen Burch & John McBride, printed by H&H Imaging, San Francisco.

With help and advice from Tom Conroy, Eleanore Ramsey & others, the Committee is cataloging the entire oeuvre of Florence Walter. We have identified eighty bindings to date and hope to discover others. Through the generosity of the extended Walter family, some sixty bindings have been donated to the Club. Together with the comprehensive collection of The Grabhorn Press formed by Florence Walter, which Margot & Perry Biestman have given to the Club, these bindings will be permanently available to Club members and the public. This supplement is a taste of those treasures.

The following two articles are remarks made by two of Florence Walter's granddaughters at the opening of the exhibition, *The Legacy of Florence Walter*, Monday, April 29, 2013:

PATRICIA SINTON ADLER

I got to live at Gaggy's house for the last year of World War II when my father was overseas. Her bindery was a marvelous torture chamber. There was a huge, squeaky paper cutter, big enough to cut off your arms and legs. There were cabinets full of sliding drawers that held wickedly sharp, wood-handled instruments. Best of all was the vertical book press that had a steering wheel mechanism to tighten and release its grip. After Sunday night dinners, my cousins and I would sneak into the bindery and insert our torsos in the press to see how much pressure we could stand.

Gaggy loved beautiful things, especially fine books. Whatever she collected appeared to gain value simply by being in her possession. She knew that life was fleeting and needed to be captured through art and ritual in order to be memorable. Every night before dinner she lit a candle beside our grandfather's framed photograph. On every one of our birthdays she gave gifts so gorgeously wrapped that it felt criminal to open them. Her wrappings were virtual bindings! On Gaggy's own big birthdays she gave each of us inscribed mementoes from Shreve's Jewelers, as if to remind us, "Remember me! Remember me!"

When Henry Snyder invited each of us to participate in this special exhibition, my heart leapt. Yes! This is exactly what Florence Walter would have wanted—a celebration of her life and art in the very institution that launched her on her life's work. Thank you so very much, Henry and The Book Club of California, for realizing Florence Walter's lifelong dream.

A Few Memories of Florence Walter, My Grandmother

MARGOT BIESTMAN

As a little girl, I loved going to visit my grandmother in her huge old Victorian home at 2299 Clay Street in San Francisco. When I rang the front door bell, I knew I was in for a treat—my grandmother loved me and everyone in the house offered kindness. Katherine, the downstairs maid, opened the door, welcoming me into the pre-parlor. I clearly remember the nearby bathroom because of the tiny flowered toilet paper, different from any other—rather waxy, and not too useful, but beautiful.

The parlor next to the pre-parlor contained a fireplace and two plush banquettes, where my sister, cousins, and I often sat and pretended we were on a train. The large living room was on the left, the dining room was in back of the parlor, where I knew I would have my favorite dinner—squab, wild rice, puréed peas, and chocolate and vanilla meringues in the shape of birds—made by Fong, her Chinese cook. The bookbindery was on the right of the parlor, where we would go later. Up the creaky stairs by a stained-glass window and onto a landing, I stepped into a sitting room, where my grandmother, named Gaggy, greeted me with a smile, kiss, and hug. She grasped my hand tightly, and affirmed, “I love you, Margot,” as if to say, “Don’t ever leave me.” I wouldn’t. I always knew she was sad, grieving for her husband who had died the year before I was born. I was here to bring her joy because she had also lost her parents, sister, and first and only son. She often played the piano for me or turned on the player piano’s rolls of music and we sang French nursery rhymes while I danced. Sometimes she showed me old photographs in a trunk in the hallway, where I fell in love with how she looked in Guatemala when she was sixteen. I thought she was so beautiful I wanted to look just like her. To this day I am touched by her telling me that my dimples meant I was kissed by an angel.

Down the hallway was a bathroom and bedroom on the right where her son, John, lived and died at the age of eleven. Sometimes I spent an overnight or more and was scared thinking if I just could live until I was eleven, then I’d be O.K. for a long life. Her bedroom next door, at the end of the hall, faced onto a large roof garden deck which attached to another large bedroom—once a nursery for my mother and two aunts, and another bedroom and bath facing the grassy hill, on top of which was a driveway leading to a studio garage that used to be a carriage house.

We would go downstairs to her bookbindery, where magic happened. I watched as she placed a book into the whirly-gig press, which she twisted and turned until the book was weighed down so pages wouldn't crinkle. She often cooked and cured her own wheat paste in the kitchen, used for gluing beautiful French end papers onto the inside leather panels of a book, as well as for the magnificent Italian leather pieces for the cover, back, and binding. She prepared her leathers with sharp knives of different sizes and shapes, with her inimitable, painstaking precision. Sometimes she picked up her huge wooden tools with brass circles at the end, and pushed the circular edge into the leather, which she had pasted on boards for the book, making perfect grooved lines. Then came my favorite part. "Don't breathe now, Margot," she said, as she laid very thin gold leaves onto a special leather pad. "The gold blows away very easily, and I can't use folded pieces." Into the grooves, with a small watercolor brush, she applied egg whites as an adhesive. Then, with a special flat knife, she laid the gold onto the grooves, waited for the albumen to dry, and cleared away the extra gold pieces, leaving twenty-four karat golden lines in the leather. She smiled as she stood back, gazing at her work, and said, "I hope you will do this one day, Margot—become a book binder."

I knew better than to speak at that moment. I had a passion for dance and didn't like reading except for books about famous ballet dancers. I couldn't envision myself binding books, however beautiful they might be! I didn't want to disappoint my grandmother, fearing a loss of love I dared not risk. She actually supported me in whatever I chose to do—dance, teach, act, write, and create art in one way or another. I am full of gratitude for her in my life.

Ten days ago, serendipitously, I looked down on one of the tables in our living room and picked up a silver cigarette box, with my grandfather's initials, JIW. Inside were the last scraps of pared colorful leathers for the last book Gaggy was working on. After she died I had taken that box as a special treasure, and it lay unopened, on our table for forty years near our collection of all her Grabhorn books. I was thrilled to find it, and immediately inspired to create a collage of her leather scraps. I pasted it next to her beautiful photo, and framed it—to bring today to an exhibition of her work at The Book Club of California.

From a letter to Henry Snyder, April 9, 2013
JOHN SINTON, *GRANDSON OF FLORENCE WALTER*

I was in love with my grandmother Gaggy's books from an early age—I loved the smell and feel of the bound volumes, the starchiness of vellum, the gold and blue of illustrated manuscripts. Incunabula was a magic word that I hurled at enemies—"You are but a miserable incunabulum, while I am pure print!"

My grandmother took notice of my interest in books, more so as I grew into my teens. It was my primary contact with her—thin white fingers carefully paging through manuscripts and tracing designs for new bindings, then mak[ing] endless notes in beautiful purple cursive.

It was through reading that I first realized as an adolescent that my grandmother was also a sexual being, like me. She must have been as well versed in salacious material as her husband, a noted roué in his youth. My source for this? When I was about to set off for my first extended trip to Europe—my junior college year abroad in Vienna—Gaggy slipped a volume in my hand entitled, *A Dog's Happy Life*, and told me to read it on the ship going over. At least that was what was on the book cover. Inside was Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*.

By the end of college I became seriously interested in Russian history and had inherited my Uncle Bincus's (Fred Eiseman) small collection of 18th and 19th century Russian travel books. Before going off to start graduate studies in Russian history at Indiana University in 1960, Gaggy asked if I'd like to bind a book with her during my last summer in California. I eagerly agreed. She asked me to choose something, and I took a Russian travel account with an irreparably damaged binding to her light-filled bindery on Larkin Street. We set to work and spent some two weeks' worth of days over the next three months, the result of which is this bound volume of Swinton's 18th century travels that I am sending along.

I hope these few notes help fill out a picture of my grandmother's life of books.

SERENDIPITY

As we go to press, the opening of the new span of the Bay Bridge is off, on, off, on, off, on, and currently off. However, we have not yet read the morning *Daily Requirement*, to purloin a title from the late great cartoonist Phil Frank. While the engineers had difficulty making a dream a reality, BCC member and architect Donald McDonald, who talked of bridges aboard the *Potomac* during our *Way Out West* Symposium, did not.

In 1998, Canadian architect McDonald submitted the winning design, modeled on a Saturn V rocket. He tells all in the last of his Bay trilogy: *Bay Bridge* (2013). It follows *Golden Gate Bridge* (2008) and *Alcatraz* (2012). His asymmetrical, single-tower, self-anchored suspension span is the largest of its type anywhere. The “White Bridge,” beautiful and graceful as seen from San Francisco’s north waterfront, follows the “golden ratio.” A line dead center on the tower would be, well, dead. Instead, viewers find a deck crossing at the top or bottom third more pleasing. The roadway crosses two-thirds down from the top of the tower.

“I have to give the public a lot of credit,” architect McDonald opined. “They really wanted a signature span and they stuck with it.” Now, after the engineers sort out bolts, shims, and saddles, and the contractors finish building the bridge, we will, after twenty-five years, get to drive over it.



David Culbert, an American history professor at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, specializing in Hollywood films and propaganda, suffers greatly from an incurable disease common among our readers. Bibliomania is so insidious, Culbert states in the winter issue of *Fine Books*, that he, cannot recall “when I finally decided that I had enough books so that I could say to someone that I was a serious collector.” The answer is “Never.”

In an event that will resonate among spouses, Culbert took his wife on their first date to meet a noted author and collector. That she went out with him on a second shows the power of two to make a collection one.

Culbert continued with kudos to Koch: “I am extremely interested in contemporary fine printing,” and the two Culberts found CODEX in February to be “an incredible opportunity.” He pointedly noted, “Such works of art remind us that some books cannot possibly look good in an online version.” One such book is the Club’s *Sierra Nevada Suite*.

On June 3, Monday, happy Club members welcomed that almost sold out book. Richard Wagener's Peter Koch-printed *Sierra Nevada Suite* contains thirty-one end-grain engravings. Actually, the book is a Koches production. Son Max, now of Austin, Texas, did the letterpress printing, while journeyman Jonathan Gerken, a member of the Publications Committee, did other work. Both thanked binder John DeMerritt, who saw this masterpiece through production.

Additionally, to celebrate this fine book printed in an edition of only 308, Wagener carved a wood cut of "Outlook Tree." See a copy of this stunning print, 20 by 35 inches, in the Clubrooms. Whereas the Club's book sells for \$450, "Outlook Tree," in an edition of twenty-eight, goes for \$1800.

Wagner began his artistic career with large paintings and abstract ones at that. However, too much mistletoe, or was it egg-nog (?), affected him one year as he determined to do Christmas cards. That brought him to wood engravings. He committed himself before he knew the complicated process.


Whereas *Harpers' Weekly* 150 years ago bolted together a series of small boxwood blocks—limited by the size of the trees—to make their center-folds, Wagener laminates his. A red-brown drawing on the surface indicates where he has incised and where he has not. This is the easy part.

Sometimes the artistic muse takes a decade to strike. Wagener's carving depends on his mood, the weather, the sharpness of his tools, and the characteristics of that particular wood. The process is a convergence of karmas. Printing, too, takes into account weather, the fluidity of the ink, the porosity of the paper, and the characteristics of the press.


Koch met Richard Wagener in 1991 when Koch visited a class Wagener was teaching and in which he had displayed some of his own prints. "I had never seen anything so original," said Koch. They have done four books together during the twenty-two years since. Each book has taken from five to ten years to produce. *The Sierra Nevada Suite* grew out of the Club's *California in Relief* (2009)—which is on AbeBooks.com for \$600. Bookseller John Windle has the deluxe edition at \$4,000.

Although Wagener grew up in Southern California and visited the Sierra often, his first Club book inspired him to see images for the next book. Its earliest views come from sketches done in 2003 from Shuteye Peak, south of Yosemite, where weird trees and fantastic rock formations intrigued him. Wagener, though, did the majority of its engravings between 2010 and 2013. The book is small due to the small size of the blocks.

Some artistic influence came from etcher Roi Partridge (1888-1984). His 1947 print "Weather Station at Donner Summit" greatly impressed Wagener. Although only building foundations remain, the rocks captivated both and Wagner placed his view closer to them. To experience the Sierra viscerally, add *The Sierra Nevada Suite* to your library.




Club author Sir Claudine Chalmers, producer of the recent *Paul Frenzeny's Chinatown Sketches*, scores again with those frenzied tavern keepers. The University of Oklahoma Press features her *Chronicling the West for Harper's: Coast to Coast with Frenzeny & [Jules] Tavernier in 1873-1874*. This Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters of France commands the front cover of the fall catalogue and a two-page spread inside. For \$45 you may read how 100 prints made by the two Frenchmen are "among the liveliest records of the westering of the 1870s."




Laid upon our table by that master librarian Gary Strong of the University of California, Los Angeles, is an intriguing pile of—Trash. In the 1940s, it seems, a Los Angeles binder tossed out some stiffeners from an old book, while his journeyman promptly retrieved them. In 1982 he gave these Middle French fragments to Special Collections. What were these six sheets?

Ask Richard and Mary Rouse, authors of UCLA Library Occasional Papers, New Series, Number 1 (2013). Their *Crime and Punishment in Paris, 1412* reveals the leaves belonged to a petty criminal register from the main Paris jail! In the book, set in early fifteenth century feuding Paris, the Rouses describe the legal system, analyze seventy-one criminal cases, and thoroughly index everything. Our friends at Castle Press printed an edition of 750.



The *Chronicle* on March 24, 2013, published Carl Nolte's touching story, "At 91, SF Fixture has Blooming Business." Of course, Nolte's subject was Al Nalbandian, honored at a BCC event in August 2012 and the subject of a feature in these columns. Al frequently donates flowers to the Club.



Club member Jacqueline Widmar Stewart has done it again, with organizing, interpretive, and analytic skills gained from a Stanford law degree. Her Lexicux Press is a “publisher of guidebooks with an emphasis on nature, culture, literature, preservation and history.” Appearing early this year is *Champagne Regained* (\$78), with a hundred photographs and text illuminating the famous French region. Its companion is *Parks and Gardens in Greater Paris* (2011; \$78).

Those books join *Finding Slovenia* (2009; \$30) a similar detailed photographic description of the homeland of Stewart’s grandparents. Previous schooling in Hoosierland or the “Basketball State” led her to delight in *The Glaciers’ Treasure Trove* (2003; \$20), the sandy beaches in five parks along Lake Michigan’s south shore.



Bo Wreden writes that the most recent issue of *Remix: The Stanford University Libraries Newsletter*, posted online, announced the 2013 winners of the Byra J. and William P. Wreden Prize for Collecting Books and Related Materials. The committee awarded first place to Wesley Chaney for his collection and essay, “Uncovering the Peasant Voice: My Obsession with the Contracts of Northwest China.” Second place went to Adrienne Johnson for “Collecting the Commonplace: The Promises of American Diet Literature.” To read their respective entries in their entirety go to <https://lib.stanford.edu/wreden-prize/> and click on the past winners tab and then on “2013 Winners.”

Chaney’s collection delves into the mundane aspects of Chinese peasant life. He traveled to “the far northeastern stretches of the Tibetan plateau, where the Yellow River first becomes *yellow*,” to collect contracts “detailing nearly every transaction of peasant lives.” As an example of the survival strategies of China’s rural poor, he cites a July 1, 1928, contract between a poor peasant, Xin Deyuanzi, and a fellow villager, Zhao Funong. He writes, “According to the stipulations agreed upon and written in the contract, Xin would marry Zhao’s daughter and enter into the Zhao home, caring for his bride’s elderly parents till their death.” All parties to the contract marked their names with an “X” excepting Xin who used his thumbprint.

Johnson on the other hand sheds astounding light on the commonplace promises, illusions, and hopes offered by a seemingly endless array of American diet books. In California, she found index cards stuffed in

a dog-eared 2007 diet book she acquired at a Sacramento Goodwill. On them were written “thirteen advantages to losing weight, beginning with ‘freedom of movement’ and ending with ‘food won’t overshadow my thoughts or my life.’”

After her epiphany at Goodwill, Johnson went on to collect diet literature ranging from the quackery of *Breatharianism* (on the miracles of nutritional air) to the hard science of *The Ketogenic Diet*. Craigslist led her to boxes of musty diet books that had belonged to a Sonoma County woman. As she cleaned each book with Clorox she experienced the growing value of her find. The Sonoman had annotated many of the books and included her “exquisitely personal diet diary.”

What stunned Johnson the most was a snapshot that fell out of one of the books. “Not obese or pitiful or haggard like her diet books might have suggested,” Johnson found the subject of the photograph “was an average-sized woman, who, for some reason, captioned her portrait ‘BEFORE’ in thick black letters.” To Johnson, that word summarized “the pain and promise of diet literature” as well as “the transformative powers of hope.” Wreden remarks, “I wonder about the transformative power of collecting.”



Anthea Hartig, Executive Director of the California Historical Society, forwards the good news that the University of California Press adopted the orphan *California History*. The last issue published by the Society will have reached members before this article appears, while this *QN-L* ought to beat the first quarterly by the university.

In the final CHS issue, editors Janet Fireman and Shelly Kale present “provocative articles that examine how Californians navigated through legal, economic, cultural, and social upheaval during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,” while Jim Rawls, book review editor for thirty years, provides an extended section analyzing new California publishing. “Irrepressibly energetic,” Dr. Josh Sides now mounts the editorial tripod. He “holds the Whitsett Chair of California History and serves as director of the Center for Southern California Studies at California State University, Northridge and will build upon the fine reputation of the journal by intensifying its academic rigor and expanding its readership.”

That irrepressible energy already pours forth as Captain Sides takes the helm. As *California History* weighs anchor, she seeks to take aboard, as stated by the Clipper Card of her sailing, valuable cargo designated

as “The Leading Edge.” This will be “a new, recurring section featuring descriptions of California research in progress and designed to foster a space in print and online where a broad community of historians engage.”

The research, Editor Sides demands, “should be current, timely, and probing. Descriptions should be 500-1000 words, and include visuals (maps, photographs, documents).” Send submissions to jsides@csun.edu to join this historically profitable voyage.

Secondly (to continue our thought interrupted in the last issue), in connection with its longtime partner Heyday Books, the Historical Society announced the new California Historical Society Book Award for a manuscript “lively and engaging to general readers” that “makes an important contribution to scholarship and deepens public understanding of some aspect of California history.”

In addition to “conventional works,” Heyday accepts biographies, collections of letters, essays, photographic and artistic studies, creative nonfiction and, as Malcolm Margolin attempts to do with all publications, all ways of “informing the mind and engaging the imagination in an understanding of California’s past.”

The prize comes with a \$5,000 advance and a promise of publication in print and online. The submission date for 2013 was July 1, with the winner to be announced on September 15. Remember, the deadline for 2014 approaches! See heydaybooks.com for more information.



Marcus Bookstore at 1712 Fillmore Street is the oldest Black bookstore in the United States, possibly. The doubt arises only because a flurry of mid-June articles in print and on the web foretold its eviction. Since then, we have heard nothing.

Raye Richardson, now 93, and Julian Richardson, San Francisco State University professors, proprietors of the Success Printing Company, and namesakes of a new senior housing project at Fulton and Gough, founded the bookshop and community center in October 1960. It is named for Marcus Garvey (1887-1940), the Jamaican politician, publicist, orator, and entrepreneur who fought for Black Nationalism and Pan-Africanism.

In its glory years, Marcus Books hosted readings by such luminaries as Toni Morrison, Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, and Oprah Winfrey. It also served and serves as a community hall for meetings, programs, and support services. In the past, it hosted the Black Panthers, the Malcolm X School,

and the first local Kwanzaa celebration. Supervisor London Breed rightly characterizes it as the “center” of Black culture in the City.

Poet, essayist, playwright, and novelist Ishmael Reed spoke for many African-American writers when he said, “The kind of work I’m writing has a small audience,” and “if Marcus Books were to disappear, it would be a great loss to many of us.” He would be then as lonely as his namesake aboard the whaler *Pequod*.

We hope that Marcus Books will be like Vulcan, that Black-smith of old, and “live long and prosper.”

The three-story violet building, home of Marcus Bookstore since 1981, is a microcosm of 125 years of San Francisco history. It began life as a large, single-family home at 1690 Post Street near Buchanan in the Western Addition. As it lay outside the fire line, after April 18, 1906, entrepreneurs divided it into apartments for businessmen and merchants. After they returned to rebuilt San Francisco, ethnically diverse workingmen came to reside there. Post and Buchanan became the center of Japantown and in 1919, the Nippon Drug Store opened in the building.

That Day of Infamy changed all. On April 6, 1942, druggist Hatsuto Yamada departed for the relocation camp at Topaz, Utah, and Black shipyard workers moved in. In 1949 the former drugstore became Vout City, Slim Gaillard’s short-lived nightclub named in a language he invented. It, however, thrived long enough to be found in Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*.

In the early 1950s, Jimbo Edwards, one of San Francisco’s first Black car salesmen, opened Jimbo’s Waffle Shop. Local musicians found its back room irresistible for late night jam sessions and transformed it into Jimbo’s Bop City. Before this jazz club closed in 1965, its wooden walls had reverberated to the hopping music of John Coltrane, Count Basie, Miles Davis, Dizzie Gillespie, Duke Ellington, Lionel Hampton, and Billie Holliday.

Meantime, bulldozers were rolling, grinding, smashing around it. Beginning in 1959 and lasting some fifteen years, planner Justin Herman remade the Western Addition. His redevelopment displaced about 1,000 businesses and 25,000 people, as it destroyed 2,500 Victorians and a Black community. The Marcus Bookstore building, however, was among a half dozen moved two blocks to 1712 Fillmore in “Victorian Village.” Its history continues, hopefully with the Marcus Bookstore inside.



Why Beer Matters. Why this is irrelevant to even state, as the matter is so obvious, shall not be pursued here. Beer produces fine books and fine drinking. Collector-brewer Fritz Maytag expounds on these dual qualities for hours. Evan Rail, a frequenter of pubs surrounding UC Davis, landed in Prague, where citizens of the Czech Republic drink more beer than anyone else in the world. Railing at those who scoffed at beer, Rail essayed through Kindle that “beer actually has a special relationship to the passing of time, and that beer is a more democratic beverage in the sense of it having very few high-profile validators.”

Probably over a few beers opened by biting off the caps, David Johnston, proprietor of Berkeley’s Sharp Teeth Press, decided to do a letterpress edition of Rail’s railing. Johnston produced 225 copies of this thirty-six page manifesto printed on handmade paper from the Shotwell Paper Mill in the Mission and bound with green hopsack cloth donated by legendary Anchor Brewing. Copies are available in electronic form, \$1.29, Kindle; and letterpress, \$100, sharpteethpress.com. As David Culbert said at the beginning of this column, “Some books cannot possibly look good in an online version.” This is one of them.



Chaos erupts, though, when comrades irresponsibly give beer to the unworthy. One night aboard the PMSS *City of Sydney* on a voyage from Panama to San Francisco all hands heard sounds of a bloody brawl. “Loud screams for help” came from the main deck, the *Call* reported on September 24, 1913, and “were heard all over the ship.” Then came “the sound of violent quarrelling.” Fearing the worst, “there was a rush forward to quell the riot.” The source proved to be a parrot, one of 200 taken aboard at Corinto, cooped in an improvised aviary. “He whistled the grand opera; he swore in Spanish, German, and United States. He had a line of ragtime conversation that cast serious reflections on the sobriety of his former owner.”

“They haven’t located the bird yet,” the paper continued. Why? “He does all his talking in the dark and was enough of a ventriloquist to prevent members of the crew from even approximating his location in the aviary. He delivers regular lectures when nobody is in the room. When he hears an approaching footstep he says something to the other parrots which makes them all join in an ear splitting chorus.” The headline said it all, “Parrot Worth \$1,000; He’s So Clever, But He Cannot Be Found.”

NEW MEMBERS

REGULAR MEMBERS

Richard Cox	San Carlos
John Hastings	Orinda
Meg Starr	San Francisco
Pascal Christian Ledermann	Sausalito
Walter & Zoe Klippert	Morega
Kitty Luce	Albany
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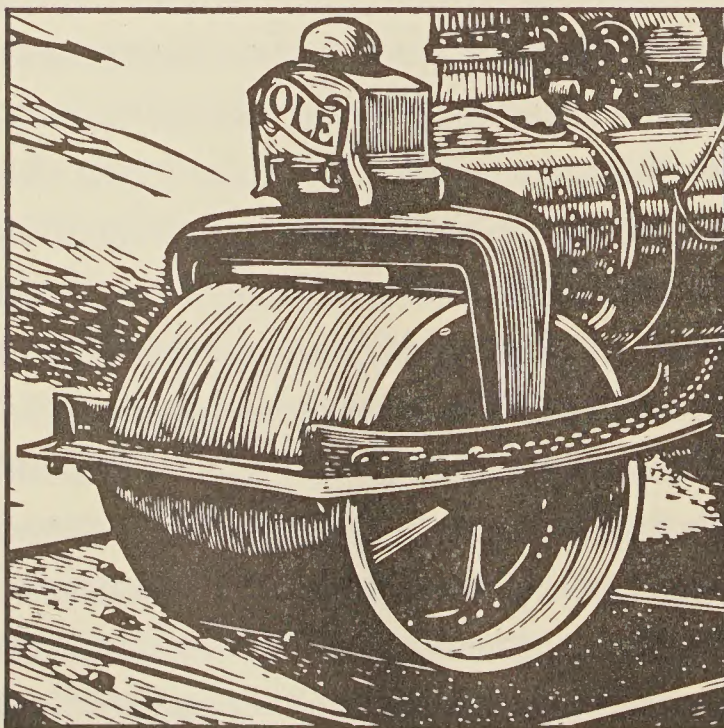
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